

Zack Lustgarten
JrCOSTEP – 2006
Ohio University,
Athens, OH
Tucson Area IHS



My name is Zack Lustgarten. I am from a small town nestled in the foothills of southeastern Ohio. I attend Ohio University in Athens, Ohio and will be graduating in December of 2006 with a bachelor's degree in Environmental Health Science with an Environmental Studies Certificate.

In the Environmental Health program at Ohio University we are required to complete an internship to graduate. As a junior, I completed two internships over the course of the year: one at a local health department and the second at the Environmental Health and Safety department at Ohio U. Both internships provided me with a wealth of knowledge as well as helped prepare me for my future. However, with graduation in sight, I felt I needed to see what other opportunities may await me when I enter the "real world". Soon after I began the search for another internship, I spoke to a classmate that completed a JrCOSTEP with the USPHS at the Reno IHS area office. Her experience sounded amazing and it was completely different than anything I had done previously. My interest was immediately sparked and I decided I would apply.

After fall quarter, I put my application in and soon received a call from my future preceptor, District Sanitarian, Quanah Nail. I was offered a position after a short phone interview and I was thrilled to accept the assignment.

A few months later I packed up my belongings and headed to the southwest. I found myself driving nearly 2,800 miles to Tucson, Arizona. Living in the hot dry desert would certainly be a change from the green forests and humidity of the Ohio valley, but I looked at it as a welcomed change.

When I arrived I was happily greeted and made to feel very comfortable by all the employees at the Tucson Area IHS office. Sanitarians Quanah Nail and Don Williams were very helpful and supportive people to work with.

They both took the time to bestow their knowledge of environmental health upon me as well as took the time to explain the intricacies of the Tribal Nations we serve.

Over the course of my three months in Tucson I was privileged to gain a lot of hands on experience with a variety of environmental health activities. I assisted in rabies clinics, conducted food surveys at restaurants and grocery stores, and got my feet wet inspecting swimming pools. I also attended a Tohono O'odham Nation STOP project coalition meeting and conducted seat belt and child safety seat observation surveys, attended food handler's training courses at the casinos and the Sells Jail, attended blood borne pathogens courses at Headstarts and casinos, investigated environmental complaints, and eventually was able to set up mosquito traps to test for West Nile Virus on the Reservation. It seemed like everyday I came to work we could get into something new and I really enjoyed not knowing what the next day may entail.

During off work hours, I spent time with my roommate, David Smith, an engineering JrCOSTEP, venturing out into beautiful Tucson and its surrounding areas. A few activities we did this summer included hiking the Catalina Mountains, cliff diving in the Sabino Canyon creeks, watching minor league baseball games, traveling to Flagstaff, hiking the Grand Canyon, swimming in the river among the red rocks of Sedona, visiting friends in Phoenix, and even traveling to San Diego and staying on the beach. There was never a shortage of things to do and if you like the outdoors you can't beat Arizona.



I would highly recommend applying for the JrCOSTEP. I learned a lot while working at the Tucson Area office and have newfound knowledge and skills that I will incorporate into the rest of my career. On top of all that I had a great time. I plan on pursuing a career with the Public Health Service in December and only hope I can someday be a part of the USPHS and the IHS. I would like to thank everyone that made my experience one to remember.